

Capacity Building and Think2Impact

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Abstract

“The difficulty to establish systems education is evident in many institutions worldwide”; “.....is a highly complex task”; “There is a strong need to educate students who can deal with the complexities of integrating environmental, social, economic and business components associated with the development of sustainable management systems and the creation of new era leadership”; “There is a need for a new way of thinking in this complex and turbulent world we live...”; “... systems thinking needs to become mainstream in society”. These are only a few sentences in current literature. Is a stronger emphasis and research on how to diffuse systems thinking in society – effective and continued capacity building -the answer?

Capacity building in systems thinking is a concept with wide implications for a variety of people. We talk about ‘Executive training programs’, formal university education, informal training and learning – depending on the purpose of the capacity building. In all cases there is a need for a new way of thinking. Executive training programs address the need of managers and other decision makers to deal with the many problems they are facing that are embedded in a complex web of global issues that are all interconnected with each other. There is a strong realisation that issues cannot be solved anymore with traditional single discipline and linear thinking mindsets. This realisation has also led to employers to increasingly require from new people entering the workforce to have the attributes/capacity to redesign in systems and sustainability terms. This requirement has become one of the biggest challenges for education in this century and creates a significant pedagogical dilemma in current university education that tends to be focused on discipline specific teaching which has no room for a wider systems approach. It has become essential to develop innovative curriculum designs and learning environments that address academic paradigms as well as industry requirements. Then there are the many people in organisations, businesses, communities, government departments and other stakeholders who are not necessary at managerial or decision making levels, but who are (should be) involved in finding solutions to every day complex problems. In their case there is also a need for a new way of thinking, but they do not require a deep knowledge of systems concepts and theories. Informal training provides these members of society with knowledge and an awareness of the basic principles of systems thinking and interconnectedness, how user-friendly systems tools can help them to unravel the complexities and how to identify leverage points in the system for interventions that would address the root causes of the problems, rather than treating the symptoms.

In this presentation the focus will be on:

- A discussion of the need for and value of learning platforms for ETPs and recent progress on determining effective modes of delivery that would have a global reach;
- Preliminary outcomes from the ‘reflection step’ of the first two rounds of the cyclic process of an ELLab for systems education, which revealed that students have shifted their way of thinking significantly from limited understanding and linear thinking to more coherent and interconnected thinking;
- How the use of Think2Impact as a global platform can fulfil our vision of educational institutions to be linked together for sharing reflections and lessons learned with each other in order to move to new levels of performance and assist each other to diffuse systems thinking into educational systems around the world; and
- the importance of capacity building through informal training (provided in the ‘Learn’ platform of Think2Impact) and co-learning during the establishment and cyclic running of an ELLab, and the capturing of these learnings to be shared through “Access” platform of Think2Impact.